

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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FIRST WEST NILE VIRUS POSITIVE BIRD THIS YEAR FOUND IN NORFOLK, VA

(Richmond, Va.)—State Health Commissioner Robert B. Stroube, M.D., M.P.H., announced today that a crow from Norfolk has tested positive for West Nile virus. This is the first bird to test positive for the virus in the state this year. Last year the state's first positive bird was found in Fauquier County on May 30th.

"This is a reminder to people that West Nile virus is active in Virginia and now is the time for people to pay special attention to eliminating mosquito breeding areas around the home before more mosquitoes become infected. Removing breeding sites and protecting against mosquito bites can reduce the risk of infection for everyone," Stroube said.

The West Nile virus positive crow was found in Norfolk on June 1, 2004. The state's Division of Consolidated Laboratory Services in Richmond confirmed that it was positive for the virus on June 4, 2003.

Twenty-seven human cases of West Nile virus and one death were confirmed in Virginia in 2003. In addition, a total of 1042 birds, 234 horses and 432 mosquito pools tested positive for West Nile virus in Virginia last year. West Nile virus was first detected in Virginia in the fall of 2000.

This year, only some local health departments are using dead bird testing as part of their West Nile virus surveillance this year. Birds that are collected for testing are limited to crows, blue jays and birds of prey (hawks, falcons, eagles and owls). Persons who find a dead crow, blue jay or bird of prey should contact their local health department to report it and to see whether the health department is testing birds for West Nile virus.

"People can prevent mosquitoes from breeding by turning over or removing containers around the home where water collects, such as old tires, potted plant trays, buckets and toys," Stroube noted. "People also should clean birdbaths and wading pools once a week, clean roof gutters and downspout screens regularly, and eliminate standing water on flat roofs." The mosquitoes most likely to bite people around their homes during the day breed in man made containers that hold water.

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West Nile Virus

West Nile virus is spread to birds, humans, horses and other mammals through the bite of an infected mosquito. Most people bitten by an infected mosquito do not get sick. People who do get sick usually suffer a mild flu-like illness. People over age 50 are at greatest risk of serious illness, such as encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) or meningitis (inflammation of the lining of the brain and spinal cord).

The Virginia Department of Health recommends the following tips to reduce exposure to mosquitoes:

- Wear long, loose and light-colored clothing.
- Use insect repellent products with no more than 50 percent DEET for adults and less than 30 percent for children. Follow instructions when using insect repellents.
- Turn over or remove containers in your yard where water collects, such as old tires, potted plant trays, buckets and toys.
- Fill in root-ball holes (from downed trees) or any depression that holds water for more than a week.
- Eliminate standing water on tarps or flat roofs.
- Clean out birdbaths and wading pools once a week.
- Clean roof gutters and downspout screens regularly.

For more information on West Nile virus, log onto the Virginia Department of Health's Web site at www.vdh.virginia.gov.

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